

## The Secret

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*(Jon is at school catching up with his friend, Joelle where he opens up to her about how his dad has been incarcerated for the past couple of years. While he doesn't disclose exactly what his dad went to jail for, it's obvious that this is something difficult for him to talk about)*

Hey Joelle, how've you been? I miss hanging out with you. I know I've been distant since we got back from winter break, but I could really use a friend right now. If I tell you something, will you promise to keep it between us? You're the only one at school who I really trust. Um... I told you a little about my dad – how he likes 90s rap and how his favorite tv show is MASH, that old black and white army show. What I left out was that he's in jail and I don't know when he's being released. It's been a couple of years since he was sent away but whenever Christmas time comes around, I just want to crawl into a hole and disappear. How do you explain to your friends that you can't get your dad a gift because he's locked up? I try to talk to him as much as I can but sometimes it's hard, I know he's my dad, but in some ways, it's like talking to a stranger because it feels like I'll never be able to hug him again as he tells me how much he loves me. When I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, he would take me on these adventures with him. It wasn't until I was older that I realized that this was his way of getting me out the house since I had so much energy and couldn't sit still. I'd say, "Dad, can you take me to get food, I'm hungry" and he would take me to McDonald's making sure a toy came with my meal. Growing up I realized very early on that I was different from the rest of the boys at my school. I wasn't into sports like they were, and I didn't know a single thing about cars, but my dad didn't care. He loved me just as I was. He wasn't perfect by any means but when I was with him, I felt safe and protected. He was my superhero. Sometimes, I like to imagine the first thing I'd do with him if he were released tomorrow. I probably would have us eating some greasy pizza while watching MASH as I explain to my dad whatever new thing I learned at school. That's another thing I miss, when I would get home from school every day, he would ask me how my day was. I'd respond excitedly telling him about something I learned or about a new book I came across. Whenever I find myself missing him, I try to reminisce on those moments of joy we would share together. This was the reason I disappeared over the break. It had nothing to do with you. I just didn't know how to bring this up because when people hear your dad went to jail, they automatically think that he did some heinous crime when that's not the case at all. My dad isn't an evil man. He didn't want to just wreak havoc on the world. He was a Black man trying to take care of his family, but all the world saw was just that, a black man; a villain. The longer he's in that cell, the more I wonder if he'll ever get out. He tells me on the phone to keep my head up and keep focusing on school but it's hard when all I want is for him to come home and for this never-ending nightmare to end. Like I said, you're the only one who I really trust - you've been nothing but kind to me even when I know I can be a little annoying sometimes. With everything going on with my dad, I have moments where I feel so alone in the world because it feels like I can't relate to everyone in our class when they talk about their parents, but you've never cared.



The Educational Theatre Association was awarded an ARI Community Arts Projects grant by the Ohio Arts Council to complete this work in the spring of 2022, under a project known as "Finding Voice".



It feels nice to be able to talk to you about this – it's not something easy to bring up which is why I keep it to myself. It's better than just having people ask me a bunch of uncomfortable questions.

*(Jon begins to rattle off questions as though he's being asked them by different classmates)*

*"Did he murder someone?"*

*"Was it tax fraud?"*

*"How long is he in for?"*

*"Do you hate him for what he did?"*

I know some people are curious out of concern, but rumors spread fast, and people misconstrue things they don't understand. *(Realizes he's been talking for a while now)*

Shoot, I just realized the time, I have run to my math class but long story short, I just wanted to say thank you for being patient with me, Joelle. It really does mean a lot.



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